UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/51/642/Add.1
6 November 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Fifty-first session
Agenda items 99 (a) and 111 (e)

TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS: UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Feasibility study on the relocation of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research to the Turin Centre" (A/51/642).

I. GENERAL

1. The Secretary-General fully shares the conclusion of the report that there is a general consensus on the need to find concrete and implementable ways to coordinate United Nations system training activities in order to use resources more rationally, avoid duplication and overlap, and consolidate activities to the extent possible, as well as on the need to tackle this question in a comprehensive manner.

2. The Secretary-General has consistently expressed his strong support for United Nations system-wide training and the role it could play in better preparing staff to face the multidimensional challenges before the Organization. At a time when the United Nations system is faced with increasingly complex and diverse mandates, often requiring an inter-agency and cross-sectoral approach, there is a need to enhance possibilities for integrated cost-effective training in areas of system-wide concern. The Secretary-General considers that a Staff College, with a curriculum to be developed in consultation with the

organizations of the system, has significant potential, not only to enhance substantive knowledge and technical skills, but also to convey a system-wide vision of goals, strategies and opportunities for coordinated action. A Staff College would not duplicate, but complement the capabilities of organizations of the system by offering multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral training with a system-wide perspective. While the primary users of the Staff College will be the organizations of the United Nations system, the College will also open its activities to selected governmental and non-governmental personnel who are partners in United Nations system activities. Consideration will be given to associating the private sector with selected activities of the College.

3. The Staff College is conceived initially as a United Nations project, financed from extrabudgetary resources, under the overall guidance of the Secretary-General, with an initial time-frame of five years. The project is based on an in-depth feasibility study conducted by a group of senior experts in 1995 which confirmed the need, and system-wide support, for the Secretary-General's initiative. It is not conceived as a single institution, but rather as a global network of training centres and academic and professional institutions. The hub of the network is a small management team located in the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization at Turin, which also serves as one of the training locations within the network. The implementation of the project has been entrusted to the International Training Centre to benefit from the Centre's existing institutional capacity and build on its recognized training environment, experience and infrastructure. This network approach will allow the College to make the best use of all kinds of training and research experience both within and outside the system.

4. In this context, the Secretary-General considers that there is a natural partnership between the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Staff College which can engender mutually beneficial cooperation in terms of curriculum development in the many areas and disciplines of shared interest to their respective target programme participants. It can enhance the cost-effectiveness of programme development and delivery. In this connection, the Secretary-General notes that both UNITAR and Staff College activities are financed in their entirety through extrabudgetary resources. Enhanced coordination will thus help address the issue of "donor fatigue" when approaching contributing governmental and non-governmental organizations. Joint training and learning opportunities for government representatives and United Nations system staff in areas of common interest can only contribute to enhancing overall operational effectiveness and responsiveness. In strengthening its linkages with the Staff College project, UNITAR would also be responding to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/121 that it further develop its cooperation with United Nations institutes and other national, regional and international institutes.

5. Accordingly, the Secretary-General shares the conclusion in paragraph 65 of the report that UNITAR should continue to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations Staff College Project through practical and concrete measures. UNITAR has already made a valuable contribution to Staff College curriculum development workshops. Areas identified for further cooperation include

peacekeeping and peacemaking; the provision of humanitarian assistance and management of complex emergencies; and the management of development activities.

6. As indicated in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the implementation of his strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources (A/C.5/51/1), Staff College activities should also be geared to facilitating standard-setting and networking throughout the system and encourage a more broadly shared management culture. As such, the Staff College may be viewed as an important component of the Secretary-General's approach to reform.

7. Should the General Assembly so wish, the Secretary-General will pursue further the proposal of the Joint Inspection Unit that a comprehensive study of the training institutions and activities within the United Nations system be conducted. It should be noted, in this connection, that training in the United Nations system remains on the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Training and the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions Panel on Training. As indicated by the Joint Inspection Unit in paragraph 64 of its report, the United Nations Staff College Project should be regarded as an important part of the Secretary-General's continuing efforts to find a comprehensive and lasting solution for the better coordination of the United Nations system training activities.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Joint United Nations Institute for Training and Research/International Labour Organization Task Force (para. 32)

8. It should be recalled that in 1993, a Joint UNITAR/ILO Task Force was created to study the issue of relocation of UNITAR to Turin. However, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit does not make any reference to this initiative or to conclusions and recommendations of the Task Force.

Cost of premises (paras. 40-45 and table II)

9. It should be noted that the amount of $78,000 per year charged to UNITAR represents only a portion of the total costs incurred by the United Nations for the maintenance and utilities of the UNITAR premises at Geneva. There is no basis to assume that the relocation of UNITAR to a new building, which may be provided to it by the Swiss Government, would be at no cost. Furthermore, the costs for rent/common services at Geneva shown in table II do not correspond to the reality, because even if the new building were to be provided to UNITAR at no cost, UNITAR would still need to incur expenditures for the maintenance of the building and for the use of utilities.

Benefits and disadvantages of the relocation

10. The only concrete data provided in the report's tables point to the conclusion that the relocation would lead to significant savings, whereas disadvantages of the move, particularly those discussed in paragraphs 49 to 51, appear to be entirely hypothetical. It would have been helpful if the Joint

Inspection Unit had provided more detailed and specific information in support of those observations.

11. Concerning the argument in paragraph 57 of the report that UNITAR would be isolated in Turin, it seems that the Joint Inspection Unit did not take into account the impact of modern communications and the fact that the Turin Centre conducts worldwide training activities without any difficulties. Rather than leading to isolation, the Turin Centre provides the facilities and environment conducive to intensive and effective training.

Funding for travel of diplomats to Turin (para. 62)

12. It is not clear in what capacity a Joint Inspection Unit interlocutor made a statement that "if participants or trainees would have to travel, funding might be available from the United Nations to send representatives of permanent missions of the developing countries from Geneva to Turin for training", which is attributed in the report to a representative of a Secretary-General. It should be noted that there are no provisions in the United Nations Financial Regulations and Rules or in General Assembly resolutions for funding training costs of representatives of permanent missions at Turin or any other location.